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THE THREE MUSKETEERS and the MAN in the IRON MASK

SEPTEMBER 1638. KING LOUIS XIII HAS BEEN BLESSED WITH A SON AND FRANCE WITH AN HEIR TO THE THRONE. LIEUTENANT D'ARTAGNAN OF THE KING'S MUSKETEERS AND HIS INSEPARABLE COMRADES, PORTHOS THE GIANT, ARAMIS THE DANDY AND ATHOS, THE ARISTOCRAT, MAKE MERRY AMONG THE CITIZENS OF PARIS . . . .

ALL FRANCE REJOICES, MY DEAR ARAMIS. EVEN THE CARDINAL'S GUARDS HAVE SMILES UPON THEIR SOUR FACES!

TRUE — I SEE A BAND OF THEM COMING NOW! BUT I DOUBT WHETHER THEIR SMILES WILL LAST WHEN THEY SEE US!

NOW, BOTH THE KING'S MUSKETEERS AND THE CARDINAL'S GUARDS WOULD GIVE THEIR LIVES FOR FRANCE. BUT OFF DUTY, THEY ARE DEADLY RIVALS . . .

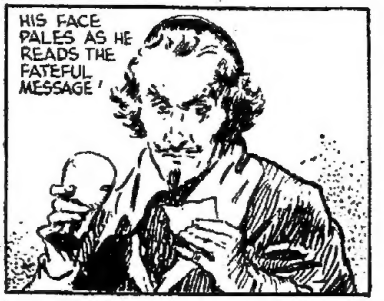
MUSKETEERS! TCHAH! STAND ASIDE, FELLOWS! CARDINAL RICHELIEU RULES FRANCE — AND WE ARE HIS CHOSEN WARRIORS!

A KING'S MUSKETEER STAND ASIDE? *NEVER!*

FAITH, ARAMIS, THERE'S A CERTAIN TRUTH IN WHAT HE SAYS ABOUT THE CARDINAL!
OUR KING MAY BE MORE OF A PEACOCK THAN AN EAGLE, COMRADE, BUT IT IS NOT A THING TO ADMIT IN PUBLIC! LET US SHOW THEM WHO ARE THE BETTER MEN!
BEATEN, MY BULLY GUARDSMAN! AND NOW I COMMAND YOU, TO THE TAVERN AND LET US DRINK THE HEALTH OF THE BABY PRINCE! THIS IS A DAY WHEN QUARRELS ARE BETTER FORGOTTEN!

MEANWHILE, AT THE ROYAL PALACE OF THE KINGS OF FRANCE . . .
YOU, MY CARDINAL SHALL TEACH HIM WISDOM AND STATESMANSHIP, AND FOR THE MORE WARLIKE ARTS OF THE SWORD AND SADDLE, WHAT BETTER TUTOR COULD HE HAVE THAN LIEUTENANT D'ARTAGNAN OF MY MUSKETEERS?
IN ALL FRANCE THERE IS NO FINER SWORDSMAN THAN D'ARTAGNAN. WHAT SAY YOU, LADY CONSTANCE.. YOU ARE BETROTHED TO HIM, ARE YOU NOT?
THAT IS TRUE, YOUR MAJESTY!
AT THAT MOMENT, THE COURT DOCTOR ENTERS.
WHAT NOW, DOCTOR MOLLET. . . . I TRUST THE QUEEN RESTS COMFORTABLY!?
PERFECTLY, SIRE. I DO BUT BRING THE CARDINAL HIS - ER - MEDICINE.

THE CARDINAL TIPS HIS POWDER INTO THE GLASS, AND SEES WRITING UPON THE SLIP OF PAPER . . .



BUT FOLLOWING CLOSE BEHIND HIM IS THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT.

WELL MIGHT THE CARDINAL PALE AT THAT FATEFUL MESSAGE. THE WORDS THE PAPER BEARS MIGHT WELL MEAN CIVIL WAR FOR HIS BELOVED FRANCE. THE CARDINAL KNOWS THAT EVIL MEN WILL BE SWIFT TO PLAY OFF ONE PRINCE AGAINST THE OTHER, FOR THEIR OWN GAIN, AND FRANCE'S LOSS, AND *THIS MUST NOT BE!*

THE COUNT, A RUTHLESS AMBITIOUS MAN, HAS SEEN THAT LOOK UPON THE FACE OF THE CARDINAL.

AT A TURN OF THE PASSAGE HE CATCHES UP WITH THE LITTLE DOCTOR.

SO THERE ARE TWIN HEIRS TO THE THRONE OF FRANCE? IT WOULD BE MORE THAN YOUR LIFE IS WORTH TO TELL THE CARDINAL THAT I HAD SEEN SO IMPORTANT A SECRET AS THIS! YOU WILL KEEP SILENT, DOCTOR MOLLET— OR IT WILL COST YOU YOUR LIFE!
COUNT—THE NOTE— GIVE IT TO ME— I BEG!

AT THAT MOMENT THERE COMES THE CLUMP OF JACK-BOOTED FEET— IT IS THE MUSKETEERS!
BEHOLD— 'TWOULD SEEM OUR OLD FRIEND THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT HAS FOUND A FOEMAN WORTHY OF HIS STEEL!

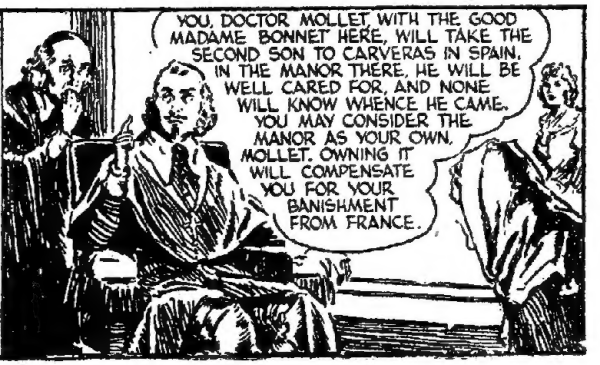
BEFORE LONG, D'ARTAGNAN, SUCH AS YOU WILL BE MY SERVANTS. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER! AND I KNOW SOMETHING THAT COULD DIVIDE THE VERY CROWN OF FRANCE!
WATCH YOUR TONGUE, DE ROCHEFORT. ONCE BEFORE YOU AND I CROSSED SWORDS, AND I THOUGHT I LEFT YOU DEAD!

WHAT DOES DE ROCHEFORT MEAN? DIVIDE THE VERY CROWN OF FRANCE, HE HAS SAID. . .

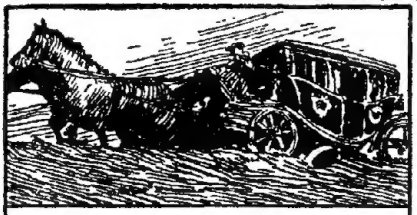
D'ARTAGNAN WATCHES HIM GO WITH A DEEP FEELING OF IMPENDING TROUBLE. . . .

AN HOUR LATER THE CARDINAL CALLS TO HIS PRESENCE ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THE SECRET OF THE TWIN SONS OF LOUIS XIII.

A DIVIDED CROWN! ALMOST THE VERY WORDS DE ROCHEFORT USED! IT IS ON THE TIP OF MOLLET'S TONGUE TO TELL THE CARDINAL THAT HIS SECRET IS OUT. . . . BUT FEAR HOLDS THE LITTLE DOCTOR SILENT. . . .



THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD STOP AT NOTHING TO KNOW OUR SECRET, AND THEY MIGHT TRY TO REACH IT THROUGH YOU. THEREFORE I WILL HAVE YOU TAKEN TO THE SAFETY OF MY CASTLE AT PASSY!
AND MAY I NOT TELL MY BETROTHED, LIEUTENANT D'ARTAGNAN, WHERE I AM GONE?
ALL BUT CONSTANCE THEN LEAVE HIS EMINENCE, THE CARDINAL. WHEN THEY HAVE GONE, HE SUMMONS — OF ALL PEOPLE — THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT.
YOU HAVE OFTEN WISHED TO SERVE ME DE ROCHEFORT. NOW THE TIME HAS COME. YOU WILL ESCORT THE LADY CONSTANCE TO MY CASTLE AT PASSY!
IT SHALL BE DONE YOUR EMINENCE!
WHAT COULD BE BETTER! NOW I SHALL DISCOVER FROM THIS GIRL TO WHAT SECRET PLACE HIS EMINENCE HAS DESPATCHED THE OTHER TWIN! IN MY OWN GOOD TIME I WILL DIVIDE THE CROWN OF FRANCE IN TWO . . . ALL POWER AND RICHES SHALL BE MINE!



SO AS NIGHT FALLS, A CARRIAGE THUNDERS ALONG THE PASSY ROAD. IN IT DE ROCHEFORT SCHEMES TO FORCE THE REST OF THE CARDINAL'S SECRET FROM THE LADY CONSTANCE.

CONSTANCE REMAINS SILENT, AND THE COUNT TRIES AGAIN.

SWIFTLY D'ARTAGNAN'S THREE COMRADES LEAP FROM THE HUGE BED . . . WITHIN FIVE MINUTES, ALL ARE BOOTED AND SPURRED — READY FOR ANYTHING!

THE COBBLED STREETS OF PARIS RING WITH THE CLATTER OF HORSES' HOOVES, AS D'ARTAGNAN AND HIS COMRADES SWEEP OUT THROUGH THE PASSY GATE

THROUGH THE NIGHT THEY RIDE, HOT IN PURSUIT OF DE ROCHEFORT'S COACH. THEY DO NOT KNOW THAT CONSTANCE IS BEING TAKEN TO PASSY AT THE CARDINAL'S ORDERS, AND FOR HER OWN SAFETY . . .

BUT THEN, THE CARDINAL DOES NOT KNOW OF THE TREACHERY THAT IS BEING PLANNED BY DE ROCHEFORT. AT LAST, AS DAWN IS BREAKING, THE CARDINAL'S CASTLE LOOMS IN VIEW

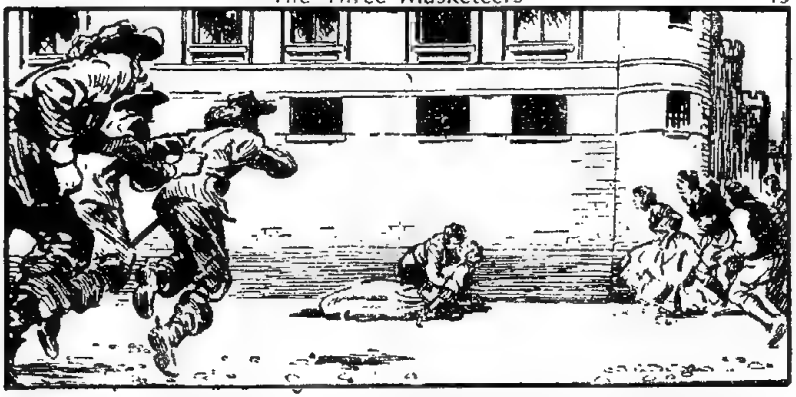
THERE ! LOOK IT IS DE ROCHEFORT'S COACH !
D'ARTAGNAN I AM PUZZLED. WHY SHOULD DE ROCHEFORT BE TAKING THE LADY CONSTANCE TO THE CARDINAL'S CASTLE ?
NO MATTER WHY. COMRADES SHE MUST BE RESCUED!
ARMED WITH THE CARDINAL'S AUTHORITY, DE ROCHEFORT TAKES CONSTANCE TO THE LIBRARY, HOPING TO FORCE HER SECRET FROM HER.
THE CARDINAL SHALL KNOW HOW YOU MISUSE THE POWER HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO YOU. I SHALL TELL HIM THAT YOU HAVE WORMED YOUR WAY INTO HIS SECRET!
THAT WOULD BE VERY FOOLISH. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU TELL ME WHERE THE OTHER TWIN IS HIDDEN, I CAN MAKE YOU THE RICHEST WOMAN IN ALL FRANCE!
OH . . . IF ONLY D'ARTAGNAN WERE HERE! BUT SINCE HE'S NOT I'LL MAKE MY OWN DEFENCE!
LITTLE FOOL!

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, COUNT DE ROCHEFORT!
SO! THE LITTLE PIGEON HAS AN EAGLE'S CLAWS! BUT IT WILL AVAIL YOU NOTHING
LOOK BEHIND YOU MY DEAR CONSTANCE!

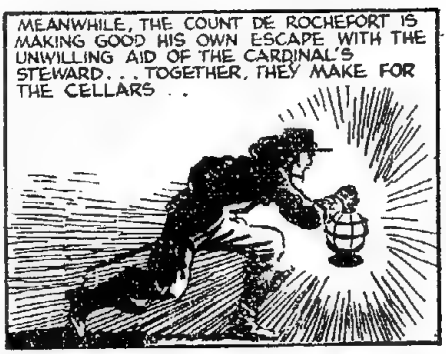
TRICKED! DE ROCHEFORT'S WARNING TO CONSTANCE — "LOOK BEHIND YOU" — IS BUT A RUSE WHICH ALLOWS HIM TO SEIZE THE PIKE WITH WHICH SHE HOLDS HIM AT DISTANCE.
SOFTLY, MY LITTLE VIXEN! RICHES CAN BE YOURS. IF YOU WILL ONLY TELL ME WHERE THE CARDINAL HAS HIDDEN THE SECOND OF THE TWIN PRINCES!
NEVER!

MEANWHILE AT THE GATES OF THE CARDINAL'S PALACE
OPEN, FELLOW— IN THE NAME OF THE KING'S MUSKETEERS!
I HAVE MY ORDERS FOR THE GATES TO STAY SHUT — IN THE NAME OF HIS EMINENCE, THE CARDINAL!

IN THE STRUGGLE WITH THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT, POOR CONSTANCE HAS CRASHED THROUGH THE WINDOW TO THE COBBLES OF THE COURTYARD.



TELL . . . THE CARDINAL . . . DE ROCHEFORT KNOWS THE SECRET. . TELL HIM I DIDN'T SAY A WORD . . TELL HIM . . . THE CROWN SHALL NOT . . . BE . . . DIVIDED !
SO CONSTANCE BREATHES HER LAST.


MEANWHILE, THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT IS MAKING GOOD HIS OWN ESCAPE WITH THE UNWILLING AID OF THE CARDINAL'S STEWARD . . . TOGETHER, THEY MAKE FOR THE CELLARS . .

BUT FOR THOSE LETTERS, WHICH BEAR THE CARDINAL'S SEAL, I WOULD NOT DARE TO SHOW YOU THIS TUNNEL—TAKE IT— IT WILL LEAD YOU TO MARENCE.
GOOD ! I HAVE FRIENDS IN MARENCE . AND LISTEN, IF THE LIEUTENANT D'ARTAGNAN QUESTIONS YOU . . . YOU KNOW NOTHING !

THROUGH THE CASTLE ABOVE D'ARTAGNAN AND HIS COMRADES SWEEP LIKE A RAGING STORM SEEKING THE MAN WHO HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE DEATH OF CONSTANCE

SUDDENLY, AS D'ARTAGNAN STRIDES ACROSS THE GREAT HALL, A VOICE RINGS OUT
IT IS THE CARDINAL!
WHO DARES TO TURN MY CASTLE INTO A MADHOUSE?

YOUR EMINENCE — I SEEK THE TRAITOR DE ROCHEFORT. BECAUSE OF HIM THE LADY CONSTANCE IS DEAD. ERE SHE DIED SHE BADE ME TELL YOU THAT DE ROCHEFORT KNOWS YOUR SECRET, BUT THAT SHE DID NOT TELL HIM — WHERE!
DE ROCHEFORT A TRAITOR? YOU RAVE, LIEUTENANT D'ARTAGNAN. AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMIES OF FRANCE, I PLACE YOU UNDER ARREST. YOU . . AND YOUR THREE COMRADES!

THE SECRET OF THE TWIN PRINCES — THE SECRET WHICH CAN BREAK THE VERY CROWN OF HIS BELOVED FRANCE IN TWO — IS KNOWN TO THE RUTHLESS DE ROCHEFORT. AND THE CARDINAL CANNOT BE SURE THAT D'ARTAGNAN AND HIS THREE COMRADES DO NOT ALSO KNOW IT . . . SO, AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMIES OF FRANCE, HE HAS PLACED ALL FOUR OF THEM UNDER ARREST.

MEANWHILE, DE ROCHEFORT, HAVING FLED FROM PASSY THROUGH THE SECRET TUNNEL, REACHES MARENCE, WHERE HE SEEKS THE INN . . .

TELL ME, GASPAR... HOW MANY BRAVOS CAN YOU MUSTER FOR A TASK OF SOME DANGER?
TWENTY, PERHAPS... IF THERE IS GOOD GOLD TO BE GAINED BY IT!
THERE IS GOLD BEYOND EVEN YOUR GREEDY DREAMS, MY HAIRY FRIEND — IF YOU CAN COMPASS THE DEATH OF CARDINAL RICHELIEU, ALL FRANCE IS YOURS FOR THE TAKING!
SAY ON! MY BRAVOS WOULD AS SOON USE THEIR KNIVES ON A CARDINAL AS ON A CHARCOAL BURNER... THE GOLD IS ALL THAT MATTERS!
AND AS DE ROCHEFORT AND GASPAR PERFECT THEIR EVIL SCHEMES, THE CARDINAL IS APPROACHING MARENCE WITH HIS FOUR PRISONERS...
MEN SAY THE CARDINAL IS JUST — WHY THEN WILL HE NOT LISTEN TO MY WORDS? WHY MUST WE RIDE IN CHAINS WHILE DE ROCHEFORT GOES FREE?
THERE ARE AFFAIRS OF STATE, OF WHICH WE KNOW NOTHING, AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS, MY FRIEND... MARK MY WORDS!

A FEW MINUTES LATER, THE CAVALCADE APPROACHES THE RAVINE WHERE GASPAR HAS SET HIS AMBUSH . . . .
DEATH TO THE CARDINAL!
CRIPPLED BY THE FIRST VOLLEY, THE CARDINAL'S GUARD IS NO MATCH FOR THE DESPERADOS . . .
BUT THERE IS HELP . . . HELP THEY BADLY NEED . . . IN THEIR VERY MIDST . . . .
MY LORD CARDINAL! MUST WE SIT IDLE WHILE BRAVE MEN DIE? GIVE US OUR LIBERTY! GIVE US OUR SWORDS!
I'LL TRUST YOU, D'ARTAGNAN, BECAUSE I MUST!

YOU'RE FIGHTING MUSKETEERS NOW, MY BULLY BRAVO... NO KNIVES IN THE BACK... BUT SWORDS, AND FACE TO FACE!
SO-HO! ONE OF THESE BRIGANDS SEEKS TO KILL MY LORD CARDINAL!
HAVE AT YOU... ASSASSIN!

SEEING THEIR LEADER OVERTHROWN, THE BANDITS SCATTER AND FLEE

AS FOR DE ROCHEFORT, WHO HAS HELD ALOOF FROM THE ACTUAL FIGHTING, HE SEES HIS DREAMS OF POWER FADING FAST . . .

FOILED! FOILED BY THAT THRICE ACCURSED D'ARTAGNAN! BUT THE DAY WILL COME WHEN I WILL TRIUMPH AND THEN NO POWER IN FRANCE SHALL SAVE HIM!

MY LORD CARDINAL, WE ARE STILL YOUR PRISONERS . . . OUR PAROLE IS ENDED!

COME INTO MY COACH, D'ARTAGNAN. I WOULD TALK WITH YOU!

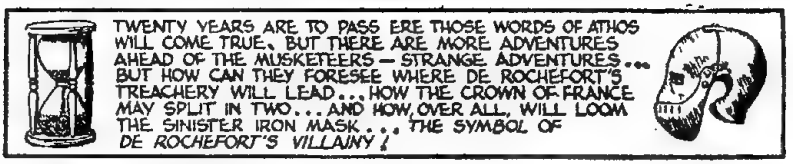
AND SO THE CARDINAL AND D'ARTAGNAN TALK TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME AS MAN TO MAN. IT HAS BEEN THE CARDINAL'S PLAN TO IMPRISON THE MUSKETEERS BECAUSE HE FEARS THEY KNOW THE SECRET OF THE TWIN PRINCES . . . NOW HE CANNOT DO THAT . . . FOR HE OWES THEM A DEBT OF GRATITUDE . . .

. . . YET HE CANNOT BE SURE THAT THEY MIGHT NOT STUMBLE UPON THE SECRET AS THEY DISCUSS THEIR ADVENTURES . . . THAT WOULD BE DANGEROUS, AND SO THE CARDINAL DECREES THAT THE MUSKETEERS MUST PART, *NEVER TO MEET AGAIN WITHIN THE BORDERS OF THEIR BELOVED FRANCE*

I HAVE LOST CONSTANCE . . . NOW I AM TO LOSE MY COMRADES. AND FOR ALL THIS — I CAN THANK DE ROCHEFORT . . . HE GOES FREE . . . I AM LEFT ALONE!

NOT QUITE ALONE, MY BRAVE D'ARTAGNAN. THERE IS FRANCE AND THE DAY WILL SURELY DAWN WHEN YOU WILL SETTLE ACCOUNTS WITH DE ROCHEFORT!

...AND SO, MY COMRADES.... WE MUST PART! NO MORE ROISTERING... NO MORE FIGHTS!
AYE—WE'VE SEEN SOME GOOD FIGHTS TOGETHER... REMEMBER WHEN FIRST WE MET...HOW YOU CHALLENGED ALL THREE OF US, D'ARTAGNAN?
YES—AND HOW LATER WE OUTWITTED THE CARDINAL AND BROUGHT THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND STUDS BACK FROM ENGLAND!
THIS IS NOT THE END—I FEEL IT IN MY BONES THAT FRANCE WILL NEED THESE FOUR SWORDS OF OURS AGAIN....


TWENTY YEARS ARE TO PASS ERE THOSE WORDS OF ATHOS WILL COME TRUE. BUT THERE ARE MORE ADVENTURES AHEAD OF THE MUSKETEERS—STRANGE ADVENTURES... BUT HOW CAN THEY FORESEE WHERE DE ROCHEFORT'S TREACHERY WILL LEAD...HOW THE CROWN OF FRANCE MAY SPLIT IN TWO...AND HOW, OVER ALL, WILL LOOM THE SINISTER IRON MASK... THE SYMBOL OF DE ROCHEFORT'S VILLAINY!

FAREWELL, MY FRIENDS... FAREWELL!

ONE DAY, TWO YEARS LATER, THE CARDINAL SENDS FOR D'ARTAGNAN....
LIEUTENANT D'ARTAGNAN! THE CARDINAL WISHES TO SEE YOU AT ONCE!
YOU WISHED TO SEE ME, MY LORD CARDINAL?
YES, D'ARTAGNAN! TWO YEARS AGO, I BANISHED YOUR COMRADES FROM FRANCE.... BUT I KEPT YOU NEAR ME! THAT WAS BECAUSE I HAD A SPECIAL TASK FOR YOU. COME TO THE WINDOW, D'ARTAGNAN...
THE YOUNG PRINCE!
YES! I WANT YOU TO BRING HIM UP AS YOUR OWN SON, D'ARTAGNAN... MAKE A MAN OF HIM... A KING WORTHY OF THE THRONE OF FRANCE!

AND SO AS THE YEARS GO BY D'ARTAGNAN IS THE INSEPARABLE COMPANION OF THE YOUNG PRINCE LOUIS . . .

HE IS AN EXCELLENT PUPIL, AND QUICKLY LEARNS ALL THAT D'ARTAGNAN CAN TEACH HIM.

BY THE TIME HE IS FIVE, HE CAN WIELD A SWORD . . . .

MEANWHILE, THE PRINCE'S TWIN BROTHER IS GROWING UP ALSO. NEITHER LAD KNOWS OF THE OTHER, FOR THE SECRET HAS BEEN WELL KEPT.

BUT PHILLIP IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM HIS BROTHER LOUIS . . .

APART FROM THE CARDINAL, ONLY ONE MAN KNOWS THE SECRET OF THE TWIN PRINCES. THE RUTHLESS COUNT DE ROCHEFORT... HE LIVES FOR ONE THING ONLY... TO FIND WHERE THE CARDINAL HAS HIDDEN PHILLIP, AND TO PUT HIM IN THE PLACE OF HIS BROTHER LOUIS... IN THAT WAY DE ROCHEFORT HOPES TO GAIN VAST RICHES AND POWER FOR HIMSELF.
WHAT NEWS, PIERRE? HAS YOUR SPYING MADE ANY PROGRESS?
I THINK SO, EXCELLENCY! I HAVE FOUND A GROOM OF THE ROYAL STABLES IN PARIS... WHO TELLS A STRANGE TALE...
"... IT SEEMS THAT SOON AFTER THE PRINCE WAS BORN, A CARRIAGE SET FORTH FROM THE ROYAL PALACE... BOUND FOR SPAIN.... IT WAS HEAVILY CURTAINED.... BUT FROM WITHIN CAME THE CRY OF A BABY...
YOU HAVE DONE WELL, PIERRE! SPARE NO EFFORT— BUT FIND OUT WHERE THAT COACH SET DOWN ITS SECRET PASSENGERS!
SO DE ROCHEFORT'S MINIONS SEARCH... MONTH IN, MONTH OUT.....
MEANWHILE... THE CARDINAL HAS GROWN OLD....
I HAVE SENT FOR YOU, YOUR HIGHNESS, AND YOU, D'ARTAGNAN, BECAUSE THERE IS A SECRET I MUST TELL YOU... BUT FIRST... TAKE THIS EMBLEM, D'ARTAGNAN, AND BREAK IT IN TWO!

D'ARTAGNAN, WONDERING GREATLY, DOES AS HE IS BID.

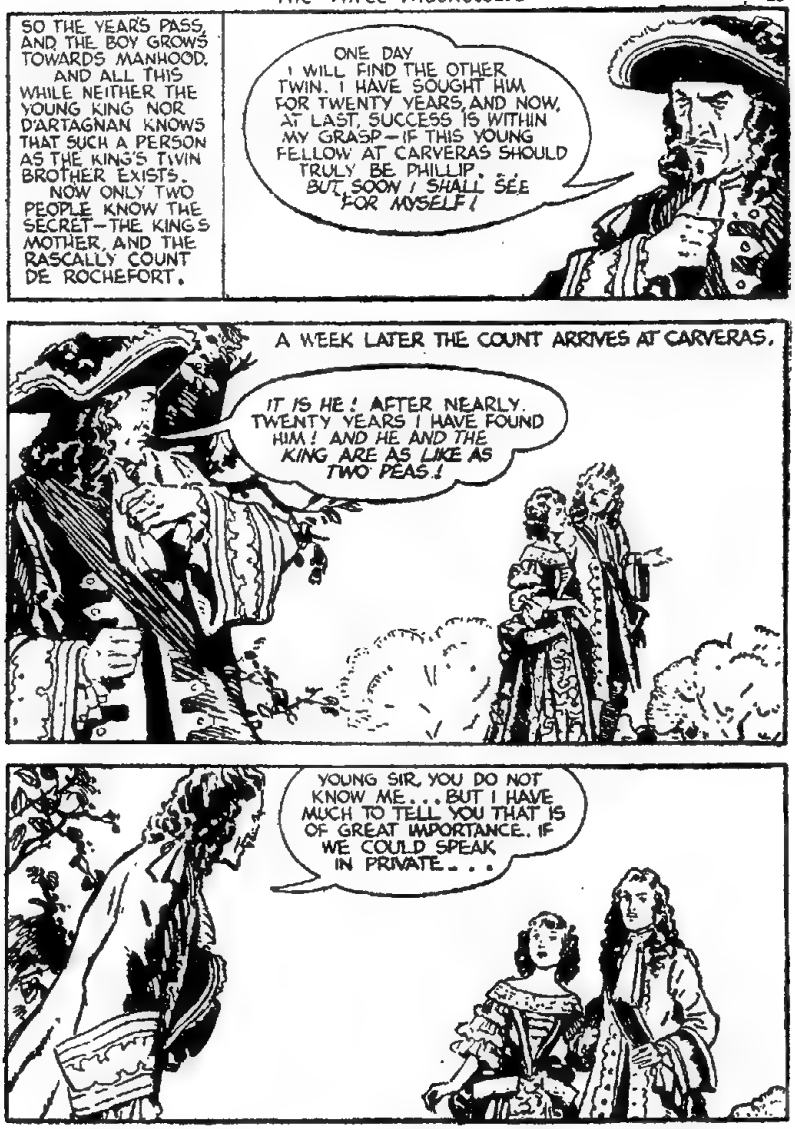
TAKE HALF THIS CROWN EACH.. KEEP THE PIECES ALWAYS . . . . . ALWAYS. . .

AND SO THE CARDINAL DIES.

CARDINAL RICHELIEU — THE STRONG MAN WHO HAS LONG GUIDED FRANCE, IS DEAD . . . .

IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR, KING LOUIS XIII DIES ALSO. . . .

SO THE CHILD PRINCE BECOMES LOUIS XIV — THE KING WHOSE REIGN IS TO LAST LONGER THAN ANY OTHER IN HISTORY.


SO THE YEARS PASS, AND THE BOY GROWS TOWARDS MANHOOD.
AND ALL THIS WHILE NEITHER THE YOUNG KING NOR D'ARTAGNAN KNOWS THAT SUCH A PERSON AS THE KING'S TWIN BROTHER EXISTS.
NOW ONLY TWO PEOPLE KNOW THE SECRET—THE KING'S MOTHER, AND THE RASCALLY COUNT DE ROCHEFORT.
ONE DAY I WILL FIND THE OTHER TWIN. I HAVE SOUGHT HIM FOR TWENTY YEARS, AND NOW, AT LAST, SUCCESS IS WITHIN MY GRASP—IF THIS YOUNG FELLOW AT CARVERAS SHOULD TRULY BE PHILLIP... BUT, SOON I SHALL SEE FOR MYSELF!
A WEEK LATER THE COUNT ARRIVES AT CARVERAS.
IT IS HE! AFTER NEARLY TWENTY YEARS I HAVE FOUND HIM! AND HE AND THE KING ARE AS LIKE AS TWO PEAS!
YOUNG SIR, YOU DO NOT KNOW ME... BUT I HAVE MUCH TO TELL YOU THAT IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE. IF WE COULD SPEAK IN PRIVATE...

AT FIRST . . . PHILLIP IS HAUGHTY . . . AND ALMOST TOO IMPATIENT TO LISTEN . . .
BUT AS DE ROCHEFORT UNFOLDS HIS TALE . . .
THEN IF I AM THE KING'S TWIN, MY RIGHT TO THE THRONE OF FRANCE IS THE SAME AS HIS . . .
I AM BEING CHEATED OF MY BIRTHRIGHT!
EXACTLY!

DE ROCHEFORT'S DREAMS ARE COMING TRUE — OR SO IT SEEMS—
EAGERLY, HE UNFOLDS HIS PLOT TO THE EVIL TWIN BROTHER OF THE KING OF FRANCE.
LISTEN TO ME! IN TWO WEEKS TIME, LOUIS WILL GO TO HIS CASTLE IN ARDENNE TO CELEBRATE HIS TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY. THAT IS OUR CHANCE . . . FOR THERE IS A SECRET TUNNEL FROM THE KING'S BEDCHAMBER!

SO, ON THE NIGHT OF THE YOUNG KING'S TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY, THE TUNNEL IS USED BY HIS ENEMIES. THROUGH THE SECRET ENTRANCE, STEP DE ROCHEFORT, PHILLIP, AND TWO HENCHMEN . . . UNDER THE ARM OF ONE OF THEM, WRAPPED IN A CLOAK IS SOMETHING . . .

AFTER TWENTY YEARS OF SCHEMING, THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT HOLDS THE FATE OF FRANCE IN HIS HANDS.

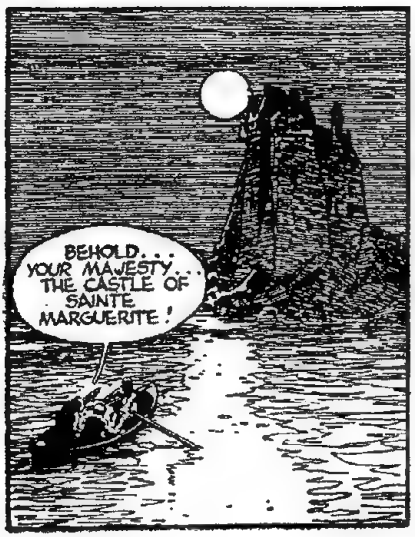
THE YOUNG KING LOUIS XIV OF FRANCE IS IN HIS POWER, AND ON THE THRONE OF FRANCE IS PHILLIP, LOUIS' TWIN.

AND NO ONE BUT DE ROCHEFORT AND HIS MINIONS KNOWS THAT THE CHANGE HAS BEEN MADE.

NO ONE WILL KNOW, AS LONG AS THE IRON MASK REMAINS UPON THE HEAD OF LOUIS.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
TO THE ISLE OF SAINTE MARGUERITE, ... YOUR MAJESTY ... THERE NO ONE WILL FIND YOU ... NOT EVEN YOUR FRIEND D'ARTAGNAN ... A PLAGUE ON HIM!

AND WHILE YOUR MAJESTY ROTS UNDER THE IRON MASK, I SHALL LIVE LIKE A KING — THANKS TO MILORD DE ROCHEFORT. NOW YOUR DEAR BROTHER PHILLIP WEARS THE CROWN, IT WILL BE DE ROCHEFORT WHO RULES FRANCE. AH — HE'S A CUNNING ONE, IS THE COUNT!


BEHOLD... YOUR MAJESTY... THE CASTLE OF SAINTE MARGUERITE!

AND SO LOUIS IS THROWN INTO A DISMAL DUNGEON — PERCHED HIGH ON A LOFTY TURRET ...
I TRUST YOUR MAJESTY IS COMFORTABLE. HO! HO! HO! HO!

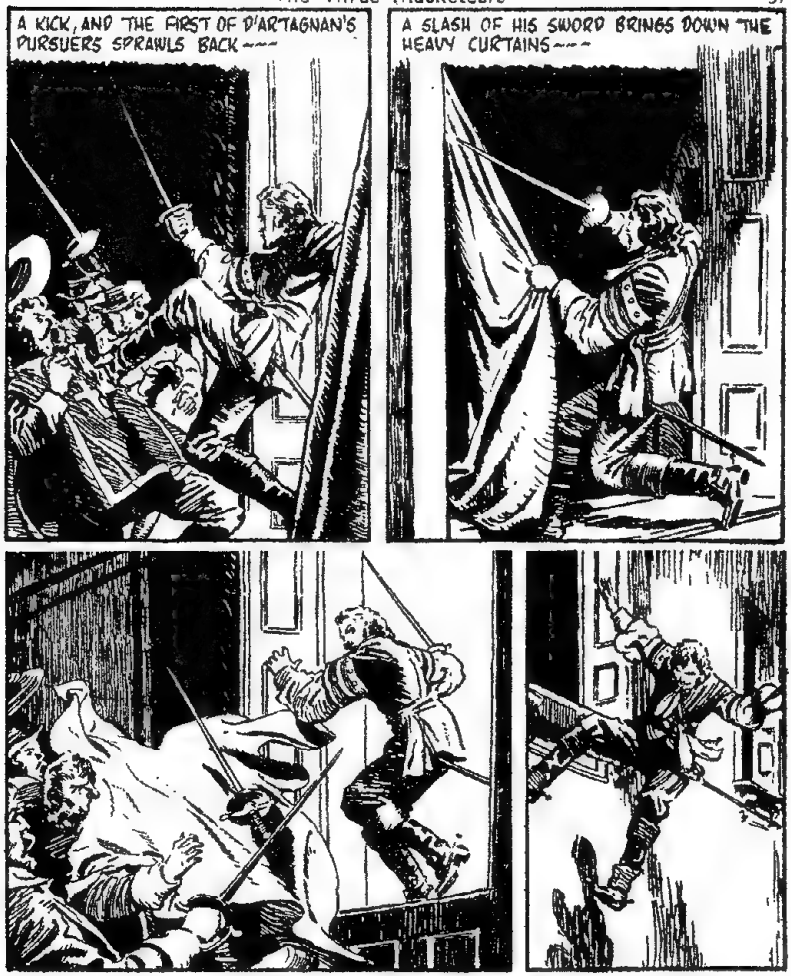
NEXT MORNING, PHILLIP, WHO HAS BEEN WELL COACHED IN THE WAYS OF HIS BROTHER LOUIS BY DE ROCHEFORT, VISITS THE QUEEN, HIS MOTHER.
GOOD MORNING MY DEAR MOTHER!
BUT YOU ARE NOT LOUIS! DEAR HEAVENS... THE OTHER ONE... PHILLIP!

YES — PHILLIP! BUT YOU WILL CALL ME LOUIS, MOTHER, AND YOU WILL CALL ME KING — IF YOU WISH MY DEAR BROTHER TO CONTINUE LIVING!

PHILLIP GOES ABOUT HIS BUSINESS AS 'KING' — HIS SECRET, HE THINKS, IS SAFE. NONE THE LESS, THE QUEEN MOTHER DECIDES TO TAKE THE RISK OF WARNING D'ARTAGNAN....
CAPTAIN D'ARTAGNAN... A MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN MOTHER... IT IS TO BE DESTROYED AS SOON AS YOU HAVE READ IT!

D'Artagnan - do not trust the King - for the King is not the King - more I dare not - tell you - Anne of Austria

A LITTLE LATER, AS THE PUZZLED D'ARTAGNAN ENTERS THE THRONE ROOM, HE IS WATCHED CLOSELY BY A MAN WHO STANDS WELL WITHIN THE SHADOWS . . .
AH . . . MY CAPTAIN OF MUSKETEERS, D'ARTAGNAN! THE VERY MAN I WISHED TO SEE!
AND AS THE KING SPEAKS, THE MAN WHO HAS LURKED IN THE SHADOWS MOVES FORWARD . . . TO STAND BESIDE THE KING . . .
D'ARTAGNAN . . . I BELIEVE YOU KNOW MY DEAR FRIEND, THE COUNT DE ROCHEFORT!
DE ROCHEFORT! AFTER TWENTY YEARS!
CAPTAIN D'ARTAGNAN . . . I COMMAND YOUR ARREST UPON A CHARGE OF HIGH TREASON!
INTO D'ARTAGNAN'S MIND COMES THE CERTAINTY THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG . . . VERY WRONG! THE KING IS NOT THE KING! SWIFT AS A FLASH, OUT COMES D'ARTAGNAN'S SWORD . . .
THERE IS MUCH I DO NOT UNDERSTAND BUT HE WHO SITS UPON THE THRONE IS NOT THE KING I SERVE! COME THEN AND ARREST ME WHO DARES!



Have you met "Dick Turpin"? Ask your newsagent for "Thriller Comics No. 2"—and while you are in the shop, why not place a regular order? "Thriller Comics" appear on the first Thursday of every month. Watch out on December 6th for Nos. 3 and 4, "Treasure Island" and "Robin Hood."

IN THE KING'S NAME— STOP THAT MAN— HE IS A TRAITOR TO THE REALM OF FRANCE!
AS IT HAPPENS, THE ROYAL PALACE IS GARRISONED BY THE CARDINAL'S GUARDS. HAD THESE BEEN MUSKETEERS ON DUTY, D'ARTAGNAN WOULD HAVE ESCAPED, AS IT IS—
CAPTAIN D'ARTAGNAN— IT IS MY DUTY TO ARREST YOU. SURRENDER YOUR SWORD, MAN, FOR YOU CANNOT ESCAPE!
MEANWHILE, IN THE ANCIENT ISLAND FORTRESS OF SAINTE MARGUERITE, THE TRUE KING OF FRANCE LANGUISHES IN A DUNGEON— WITH THE IRON MASK THAT DE ROCHEFORT HAS LOCKED UPON HIM HIDING HIS FACE FROM THE WORLD—
THEN ONE DAY, AS HE LOOKS FROM HIS DUNGEON WINDOW, THE KING SEES A FISHING BOAT—
IF I COULD ONLY GET A MESSAGE TO YONDER FISHERMAN!

FIRED BY THE THOUGHT, LOUIS SEIZES HIS PEWTER PLATE, AND WITH A PRONG OF HIS FORK, BEGINS TO SCRATCH A MESSAGE---
IF I CAN BUT GET THIS TO D'ARTAGNAN!
LOUIS RACKES HIS BRAINS FOR A WAY TO SIGN HIS MESSAGE, SO THAT HIS FRIEND WILL KNOW IT TO BE GENUINE. SUDDENLY HE THINKS OF HIS HALF OF THE BROKEN CROWN THAT HE STILL CARRIES--- CAREFULLY HE SCRATCHES ITS SHAPE UPON THE PLATE---
NOW— WHAT CAN THIS BE?
LUCKILY FOR THE KING THE FISHERMAN CAN READ--- "TO THE CAPTAIN D'ARTAGNAN, OF THE KINGS MUSKETEERS IN PARIS" WITH THOUGHTS OF REWARD IN HIS MIND, THE FISHERMAN TAKES THE PARIS ROAD AT DAWN ---

MEANWHILE, PORTHOS ALSO ARRIVES IN PARIS ---
I HEAR THAT D'ARTAGNAN IS IMPRISONED LIKE A FELON-IS IT TRUE?
YES--IT IS TRUE! WE LIVE IN STRANGE TIMES. SOME SAY THAT DE ROCHEFORT IS THE REAL KING OF FRANCE-BUT YOUR COMRADES, ATHOS AND ARAMIS, ARE IN PARIS, TOO!
THEY ARE AT THE BLUE BOAR---
BUT WHAT DO YOU WANT FELLOW?
A MESSAGE FOR D'ARTAGNAN? GIVE IT TO ME!
YOU ARE A MUSKETEER, SIR--I HAVE A MESSAGE FOR D'ARTAGNAN OF THE MUSKETEERS-WHERE CAN I FIND HIM?
A MESSAGE SCRATCHED ON A PLATE --"TO D'ARTAGNAN OF THE KING'S MUSKETEERS, PARIS-I AM A PRISONER IN SAINTE MARGUERITE-THEN THERE IS A SHAPE SCRATCHED --LIKE THE HALF OF A CROWN
WHAT MEANS THIS?
I AM BUT A POOR FISHERMAN, EXCELLENCY---
SO PORTHOS REWARDS THE FISHERMAN--AND GOES TO THE BLUE BOAR TAVERN-THE THREE MUSKETEERS ARE RE-UNITED--THOUGH D'ARTAGNAN'S PLIGHT DRIVES OUT ALL THOUGHT OF CELEBRATING THE OCCASION---
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THIS MESSAGE, BUT PERHAPS D'ARTAGNAN WILL DO--IN ANY CASE, HE MUST BE RESCUED!
METHINKS THERE IS A WAY-DO YOU NOT REMEMBER THE CATACOMBS?
THE VERY NOTION. MY COMRADES--WE WILL RESCUE D'ARTAGNAN THIS VERY NIGHT!

AND SO, AS THE MOON RISES OVER PARIS THE THREE COMRADES TAKE TO A BOAT ON THE RIVER SEINE--
HERE'S THE TUNNEL!
'TIS LUCK THAT THE TIDE'S NO HIGHER!
FOR THE NEXT TEN MINUTES IT SEEMS THAT THEY ROW DEEP INTO THE VERY BOWELS OF THE EARTH, THEN----
HERE ARE THE STEPS!
AYE--FROM THE LOOK OF THEM NONE BUT FROGS AND RATS HAVE TROD DEN THEM SINCE LAST WE DID-- MANY YEARS AGO!
LOOSEN YOUR SWORDS, MY COMRADES-- WHO KNOWS WHAT TROUBLES AWAIT US IN THE BASTILLE!
AT LAST THEY REACH THE STONE SLAB WHICH LEADS INTO THE VAULTS OF THE PRISON--AS PORTHOS PRESSES IT UPWARDS--LUCK TURNS AGAINST THEM--
WHO COMES THERE? WHO ARE YOU, I SAY? HO-- GUARDS!

WAS HE HEARD? IS ANYONE COMING?
I HEAR JACKBOOTS! YOUR SWORDS COMRADES!
I'M WITH YOU-- ONE FOR ALL--ALL FOR ONE-- HOLA! BUT THIS IS LIKE THE OLD DAYS!
BACK, COMRADES— TO THE DOOR!
I HEAR D'ARTAGNAN'S VOICE ~~~~ —HOLA--- D'ARTAGNAN!

HOLA MUSKETEERS! HURRY COMRADES I HAVE THE TURNKEY BY THE SHORT HAIRS OF HIS DIRTY NECK!
HO-HO-HO! SEE HIM RUN!
PEST TAKE IT, PORTHOS—THE FELLOW WILL UNBAR THE VAULT AND LET THE OTHERS OUT!
AND SO D'ARTAGNAN AND THE THREE MUSKETEERS ARE RE-UNITED AFTER TWENTY YEARS
TOGETHER—FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE CARDINAL RICHELIEU BID US PART!
IF THE CARDINAL KNEW THE SORRY STATE OF FRANCE TO-DAY, HE WOULD BID US RE-UNITE!
LET US AWAY D'ARTAGNAN... THERE IS LITTLE TIME...
THIS WAY, COMRADES... I HAVE A PLAN!
D'ARTAGNAN LEADS THE WAY, TILL THEY COME TO A SPOT WHERE SOME WORKMEN ARE REPAIRING THE BUILDING...
CAN YOU CARRY THIS GREAT BEAM, PORTHOS?
EASILY!

UP THESE STAIRS . . . COMRADES!
THE STAIRS LEAD TO THE ROOF OF ONE OF THE WATCH TOWERS . . .
THEY ARE COMING . . HURRY, PORTHOS!
BAH! THIS LOAD-CARRYING IS NO WORK FOR A MUSKETEER AND A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE!
HEAVE THE BEAM ACROSS THE ROOF-TOP YONDER . . . IT SHALL BE OUR BRIDGE TO FREEDOM!
AND SO THE COMRADES ESCAPE FROM THE BASTILLE . .

PORTHOS . . PULL THE BEAM FROM THE TOWER. . . I SHALL NOT FALL. PULL IT AWAY, I SAY !
IF ANY OTHER MAN SAID THAT, I'D CALL HIM CRAZY, BUT YOU ARE, D'ARTAGNAN... AND SO... I PULL !

D'ARTAGNAN I CAN HOLD THE BEAM NO LONGER—THERE IS NO GRIP FOR MY FINGERS!
THEN LET IT TUMBLE, COMRADE, LET IT TUMBLE!
YOUR HAND, ATHOS!
AND SO THE COMRADES ESCAPE ACROSS THE ROOF-TOPS OF PARIS — MAKING FOR THE STABLE-YARD OF THE BLUE BOAR INN . . . .
HERE FELLOW! HORSES! A PURSE OF GOLD FOR YOU IF THEY ARE READY BEFORE THE WATCH ARRIVES!
TO THE SOUTH GATE, COMRADES . . . AND PRAY THAT IT IS STILL OPEN!
AYE . . . WE HAVE RAISED A PRETTY HUE AND CRY . . . PERCHANCE NO ONE HAS THOUGHT TO WARN THE GATEKEEPERS!

BUT WHEN THEY REACH THE SOUTH GATE IN THE WALL OF PARIS . .
SHUT!
THE MASSIVE PORTCULLIS IS DOWN. . .THE WAY TO FREEDOM IS BARRED!
KEEP 'EM BACK, COMRADES . . . AND LET ME GET MY HANDS ON THIS PORTCULLIS!
QUICKLY, COMRADES. . . THROUGH THE GATE! THIS GRILL LIES HEAVY ON MY SHOULDERS AS A PAR-BOILED PUDDING ON MY STOMACH!

LET THE GATE GO, PORTHOS . . . LET IT GO!
TO HORSE, COMRADES, TO HORSE!
AND SO THE COMRADES ESCAPE FROM PARIS AND, RIDING LIKE THE WIND, OUTSTRIP THEIR PURSUERS, WHO ARE SOME TEN MINUTES BEHIND THEM . . .
THEY COME AT LAST TO THE INN AT ARDENNE WHERE THEY HAVE A GOOD FRIEND . . . .
JOLIBOS — GIVE US SHELTER AND PUT THESE HORSES WHERE THEY WILL NOT BE FOUND!
MY FRIENDS! IT IS MANY YEARS SINCE YOU CAME ROISTERING HERE. MANY YEARS SINCE YOU SAVED MY LIFE. AND I FEEL IT IN MY BONES THAT THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO REPAY MY DEBT!
QUICKLY . . . TAKE THESE HORSES TO THE CAVE . . . AND IF ONE OF YOU BREATHES A WORD OF EVER SEEING THEM . . . I'LL BOIL YOU IN A STEW! PIERRE, SHOW THESE GENTLEMEN TO MY OWN ROOM — AND MAKE HASTE ABOUT IT!

TEN MINUTES LATER, THE PURSUERS ARRIVE
HEY~~ YOU~~ HAVE FOUR MEN RIDDEN PAST THIS WAY?
WHAT'S THAT? A FARM CART WITH A LOAD OF HAY?
I SAID~~ HAVE FOUR MEN RODE ~ PAST ~ THIS ~ WAY?
OH AYE ~ ~ IT'S LOVELY FOR THE TIME OF DAY
THE MAN'S AN IDIOT~ ~ WE'RE WASTING OUR TIME, COME ON!
AND SO, THANKS TO JOLIBOS, THE PURSUERS RIDE ON, AND IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM, THE MUSKETEERS HOLD CONFERENCE OVER THE MYSTERIOUS PEWTER PLATE WHICH D'ARTAGNAN IS SEEING FOR THE FIRST TIME
SEE THE WORDS, D'ARTAGNAN~~ "I AM PRISONER IN SAINTE MARGUERITE"~~ WHO IS PRISONER? AND WHAT IS THE STRANGE SHAPE LIKE HALF OF A CROWN SCRATCHED BELOW?
THIS IS AS CLEAR TO ME AS IT IS TERRIBLE. THE PRISONER, GENTLEMEN, IS THE KING OF FRANCE. THIS SHAPE IS THE HALF OF A CROWN ~ ~ OF WHICH I HAVE THE OTHER HALF~ ~
CARDINAL RICHLIEU, AS HE LAY ON HIS DEATH-BED, GAVE HALF THIS TRINKET TO ME, AND HALF TO OUR KING. THIS IS THE KING'S WAY OF LETTING ME KNOW THAT THE MESSAGE IS GENUINE. WE MUST RESCUE HIM, AND OVERTHROW THIS FALSE KING THAT DE ROCHEFORT HAS PUT IN LOUIS' PLACE ~

YOUR MAJESTY ~ ~ WHAT I HAVE TO SAY IS FOR YOUR EARS ALONE!
REALLY DE ROCHEFORT ~ ~ CANNOT A KING EAT HIS BREAKFAST IN PEACE! BUT SINCE IT IS YOURSELF ~ I SUPPOSE I HAD BETTER LISTEN. GO ~ ~ FELLOWS LEAVE US ALONE!

D'ARTAGNAN WAS RESCUED FROM THE BASTILLE LAST NIGHT BY HIS OLD COMRADES, ATHOS, PORTHOS AND ARAMIS ~ WITHOUT DOUBT THEY WILL ATTEMPT TO RESCUE YOUR DEAR BROTHER!
SAINTS PRESERVE ME DE ROCHEFORT ~ ~ ~ THIS MUST NOT BE! MY BROTHER MUST BE MOVED FROM SAINTE MARGUERITE AT ONCE! HE MUST NOT BE FOUND!

IF IT WERE NOT FOR MY MOTHER, WE COULD KILL MY DEAR BROTHER ~ ~ ~ THAT WOULD END ALL OUR WORRIES. BUT SHE WOULD TELL ~ ~
I HAVE A PLAN YOUR MAJESTY. LET YOUR BROTHER BE THE BAIT IN A TRAP ~ ~ A TRAP TO CATCH FOUR PLAGUEY MUSKETEERS!

A FEW DAYS LATER IN A LITTLE SEAPORT, NEAR THE ISLAND FORTRESS OF SAINTE MARGUERITE - -
YOU SEE THIS BARGE, COMRADES! IT IS TO TAKE SUPPLIES TO SAINTE MARGUERITE, FOR THE GARRISON THERE. METHINKS IT MIGHT ALSO TAKE US!
AND SO IT IS - HIDDEN IN BARRELS, THE FOUR COMRADES SAIL FOR SAINTE MARGUERITE AS PART OF THE CARGO OF SUPPLIES
AT THE END OF THEIR JOURNEY, THE CARGO IS UNLOADED, AND THUS THE COMRADES FIND THEMSELVES IN THE CELLARS OF SAINTE MARGUERITE
COMRADES - ASSIST ME, I PRAY - THE SONS OF MONKEYS WHO CARRIED ME HERE HAVE LEFT ME WITH MY FEET UPPERMOST!
WHY DO THESE MISFORTUNES ALWAYS BEFALL ME? I AM NOT BUILT FOR SUCH FOOLISHNESS!

ENOUGH OF JESTING! A THOUGHT HAS COME TO ME – WHY SHOULD A FORSAKEN PLACE LIKE THIS NEED SO MANY SUPPLIES AS WE SEE AROUND US HERE? I TELL YOU COMRADES – – THERE ARE MORE MEN HERE THAN WE BARGAINED FOR – – AND THAT SMELLS LIKE A TRAP TO ME
STAY YOU HERE! I GO TO FIND HOW MANY ENEMIES WE MUST FIGHT BEFORE WE REACH THE KING'S SIDE!
ALL THIS BECAUSE MILORD DE ROCHEFORT THINKS THAT THE RENEGADE D'ARTAGNAN WILL COME HERE WITH HIS COMRADES – FIFTY OF US – – TO TRAP FOUR PLAGUEY MUSKETEERS – – – WHAT IS THERE TO MAKE THEM COME HERE, I'D LIKE TO KNOW!
WHAT INDEED? UNLESS IT BE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE PRISONER IN THE TOWER – – HE WHO IS GUARDED NIGHT AND DAY BY DE ROCHEFORT'S PICKED CUT-THROATS – – WHO COULD HE BE, THINK YOU?
I AM NOT PAID TO THINK – – AND NEITHER ARE YOU, SOLDIER. COME WITH ME – – THERE ARE KEGS OF NEW POWDER IN THE CELLARS – WE'LL FETCH 'EM UP!

DE ROCHEFORTS MEN ARE COMING TO THE CELLARS, WHERE PORTHOS AND THE OTHERS ARE HIDING ----
I'LL LEND YOU A HAND WITH THOSE POWDER KEGS, MESSMATES!
AND I' MAYTHING TO PASS THE TIME. I AM WEARY OF WAITING FOR THIS D'ARTAGNAN AND HIS MUSKETEERS!
-SWIFTLY D'ARTAGNAN LEAPS DOWN THE CELLAR STEPS TO WARN HIS COMRADES ---
SOFTLY, COMRADES --- METHOUGHT I HEARD OTHER FOOTSEPS FOLLOWING BEHIND D'ARTAGNAN!
PERHAPS WE SHALL FIND SOMETHING BETTER THAN GUNPOWDER IN BARRELS!
WHERE ARE THESE KEGS? WE SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT A LANTERN!
AYE! A BODY COULD GET BADLY HURT FALLING OVER SOMETHING IN THE DARK!

THEN THE MUSKETEERS GO INTO ACTION!
HELP!
HELP!
WHAT WAS THAT?
THAT FOOL GASPAR HAS FALLEN OVER SOMETHING I'LL BE BOUND--BUT YOU'D BETTER GO AND FIND OUT SOME OF YOU!
SO THE REST OF DE ROCHEFORTS MEN HURRY TO THE CELLARS--
DON'T PUSH, COMRADES-- THESE STEPS ARE DARK!
BUT LOWER, THE MUSKETEERS HAVE SET A LENGTH OF WOOD ACROSS TO TRIP THEM----
HELP! I AM FALLING!
IT IS A TRAP!

UP COMRADES! FOLLOW ME! THERE IS NO TIME FOR PLANNING! IT'S NECK OR NOTHING NOW!
I GO ON TO FIND THE KING!
ME--- I AM NOT BUILT FOR LEAPING ABOUT LIKE A MOUNTAIN GOAT- IF THERE ARE STAIRS I LIKE TO USE 'EM!
WHEN I HAVE DRAWN THE HUE AND CRY AFTER ME, FOLLOW SWIFTLY-YONDER ARCHWAY LEADS TO THE TOWER WHERE OUR KING IS PRISONER!

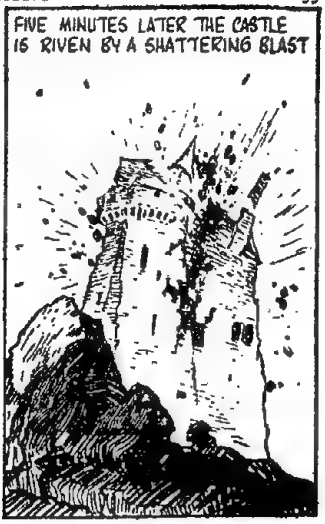
THREE BOUNDING STRIDES—A LEAP—AND D'ARTAGNAN GRABS AT THE CHANDELIER---
HE SWINGS AND THE NEXT SECOND HE IS ON THE GALLERY---
UP THE STAIRS—WE'LL CATCH HIM!
EGGS! WHAT COULD BE BETTER! I HAD EXPECTED TO FIGHT THE LOT OF YOU HERE—BUT I AM NOT FUSSY!

BEFORE THEY CAN SORT THEMSELVES OUT FROM THE BARRELS, PORTHOS, ATHOS AND ARAMIS ARE UPON THEM---
HERE IS OUR BATTLE STATION, COMRADES--!
WE HOLD THIS TOWER AGAINST ALL COMERS WHILE D'ARTAGNAN FREES OUR KING!

UPSTAIRS, D'ARTAGNAN MEETS THE KING'S WARDER---
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
YOU'LL FIND OUT, MY BULLY- YOU'LL FIND OUT!

I'LL NOT SOIL MY SWORD ON THE LIKES OF YOU, FELLOW!
OUCH!
D'ARTAGNAN! MY FAITHFUL FRIEND!
YOUR MAJESTY! COME SWIFTLY--WE WILL HAVE TO FIGHT OUR WAY OUT OF THIS GLOOMY FORTRESS!
I KNEW YOU WOULD NOT FAIL ME!
MY LORD DE ROCHEFORT'S FORCES SEEM ENDLESS... THERE'S A BATTLE HERE TO FIGHT!
THEN I'LL FIND ME A SWORD AND JOIN YOU... IF FATE IS AGAINST US, THEN I ASK NO BETTER THAN TO FALL IN SUCH COMPANY AS YOURS, MY MUSKETEERS!

BUT, WHILE THE BATTLE STILL RAGES AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS, OTHERS OF DE ROCHEFORT'S HENCHMEN ARE BUSY IN THE CELLARS---
SUCH WERE LORD DE ROCHEFORT'S ORDERS, LUIGI—IF THERE SEEMS ANY CHANCE OF OUR ENEMIES ESCAPING, HE SAYS TO ME, BLOW 'EM SKY HIGH!
AH—BUT HIS LORDSHIP'S A CUNNING ONE!


FIVE MINUTES LATER THE CASTLE IS RIVEN BY A SHATTERING BLAST

THE FLOOR ROCKS—THE WALLS QUIVER AND SPLIT. THE GALLERY ABOVE COMES CRASHING DOWN—BUT THE MIGHTY SHOULDERS OF PORTHOS ARE THERE —
QUICKLY, ATHOS—AID ME TO DRAG OUT D'ARTAGNAN AND ARAMIS. THEN WE MUST FIND SOME WAY TO EASE THE LOAD THAT PORTHOS BEARS!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME YOUR MAJESTY, GET THEM TO SAFETY! AM LIKE AN OLD CART HORSE—AND BEARING THIS A LITTLE LONGER WILL NOT HARM ME!

FIRST ARAMIS IS DRAGGED CLEAR, FOR HE IS STUNNED. THEN PORTHOS STRAINS TO EASE THE WEIGHT THAT PINS DOWN D'ARTAGNAN'S LEGS —
BY MY FAITH, COMRADES—BUT THEY BUILT OLD CASTLES OF SOLID STUFF—'TIS AS MUCH AS EVEN I CAN DO TO HOLD IT UP!

LET US SET THEM DOWN HERE, YOUR MAJESTY— THEY WILL BE SAFE!
YES—AND THEN LET US GO BACK FOR PORTHOS!
NO—NO— LET ME GO— YOU ARE THE KING—YOUR LIFE IS PRECIOUS TO FRANCE!
THEN THE FLAMES REACH MORE POWER IN ANOTHER PART OF THE CELLARS, AND ANOTHER THUNDEROUS EXPLOSION SHATTERS WHAT IS LEFT OF THE CASTLE ---
PORTHOS! HE'S UNDER THERE! HE'S TRAPPED!
IT TAKES MORE THAN A CASTLE ON THE HEAD TO FINISH PORTHOS! THERE'S GRIT IN MY HAIR, AND SAND IN MY MOUTH— BUT NO WORSE— ON TO PARIS COMRADES— LONG LIVE THE KING!
THEY TRY TO HELP PORTHOS -- BUT HE URGES THEM AWAY, FOR EVERY MOMENT THEY LINGER ENDANGERS THE KING. AND SO, AFTER TOILING VAINLY FOR SEVERAL HOURS, THEY ARE FORCED TO LEAVE HIM. WITH HEAVY HEARTS THEY ROW FOR THE MAINLAND ---

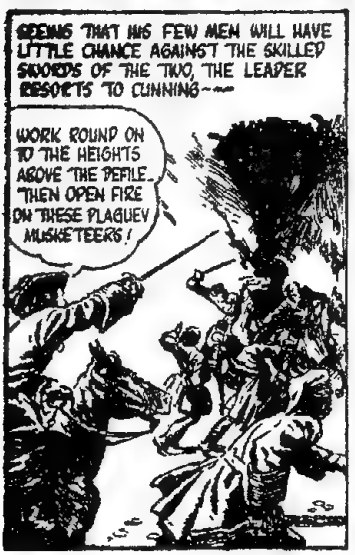
AND LATER, DE ROCHEFORT'S TWO ASSASSINS REACH PARIS, AND REPORT TO THEIR EVIL MASTER--
AND AS WE LOOKED BACK FROM OUR BOAT, WE SAW FOUR OF THEM STAGGER OUT--AND HE OF THE IRON MASK WAS AMONG THEM!
TEN THOUSAND CURSES! DO THEY BEAR CHARMED LIVES? AM I NEVER TO BE FREE OF THEM?
LET EVERY ROAD TO PARIS BE SCOURED BY CAVALRY! LET THE GATES BE GUARDED! THE MUSKETEERS AND THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK MUST DIE!
MEANWHILE ALONG THE PARIS ROAD THUNDER FOUR HORSEMEN---
DE ROCHEFORT'S RATS LEFT SAINTE MARGUERITE WELL BEFORE US--BY NOW THEY WILL HAVE TOLD THE TALE TO THEIR MASTER!
IF THAT IS SO, YOUR MAJESTY, WE CAN LOOK FOR TROUBLE. DE ROCHEFORT WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO DESTROY US!

THE RIDERS COME TO MARENCE AND AHEAD OF THEM LIES THE FIRST OF DE ROCHEFORT'S ROAD BLOCKS --
LOOK! BARRICADES! DE ROCHEFORT WILL HAVE DEALT THUS WITH EVERY ROAD TO PARIS!
BUT BY THE ROADSIDE IS A FARM-- THE GOLD IN THEIR PURSES READILY BUYS AN OLD WAGON ~~~
IF THE GENTLEMEN WISH TO PAY ME GOLD FOR RUBBISH, THEN WHO AM I TO DENY THEM!
THEY PILE IT HIGH WITH JUNK, AND THEN D'ARTAGNAN SETS A TORCH TO IT--
LET IT ROLL! HERE IS WHERE WE SINGE DE ROCHEFORT'S BEARD FOR HIM
BELCHING FIRE THE WAGON HURTLES TOWARDS THE BRIDGE--
THIS IS A TRICK OF THE RENEGADE D'ARTAGNAN!
TO ARMS BRING UP POWDER AND SHOT!

THEN IT IS UPON THEM--
SMASHING THE BARRICADE, STREWING BURNING WRECKAGE IN EVERY DIRECTION ---
---AND SOME FALLS AMONG THE KEGS OF BLACK MUSKET-POWDER. WITH A ROAR AND A FLASH THEY EXPLODE AT ONCE.
BEFORE THE ECHOES OF THE EXPLOSION DIE AWAY THERE COMES THE CLATTER OF HOOVES, AS D'ARTAGNAN LEADS HIS KING AND HIS COMRADES IN A HEADLONG CHARGE THROUGH THE BURNING WRECKAGE---
MAKE WAY- MAKE WAY FOR THE KING OF FRANCE!

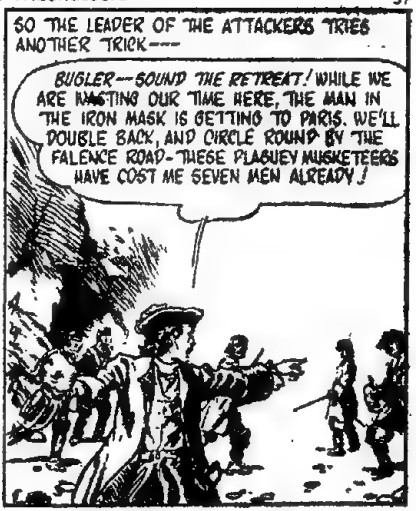
TO HORSE! AFTER THEM! MY LORD DE ROCHFORT WILL HAVE YOUR LIVES IF THEY ESCAPE!

A FEW MILES ON THE ROAD RUNS THROUGH A NARROW DEFILE. THERE ATHOS AND ARAMIS HALT TO MAKE A STAND---
FORWARD, MEN! CUT THEM DOWN THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK MUST NOT ESCAPE!


SEEMS THAT HIS FEW MEN WILL HAVE LITTLE CHANCE AGAINST THE SKILLED SWORDS OF THE TWO, THE LEADER RESORTS TO CUNNING---
WORK ROUND ON TO THE HEIGHTS ABOVE THE DEFILE. THEN OPEN FIRE ON THESE PLAGUEY MUSKETEERS!

BUT THE EYES OF ATHOS ARE SHARP---
ARAMIS--- LOOK--- ABOVE YOU!

BOTH BARRELS OF HIS PISTOL SPURT FLAME--- ARAMIS NEVER MISSES!


SO THE LEADER OF THE ATTACKERS TRIES ANOTHER TRICK---
BUGLER--SOUND THE RETREAT! WHILE WE ARE WASTING OUR TIME HERE, THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK IS GETTING TO PARIS. WE'LL DOUBLE BACK, AND CIRCLE ROUND BY THE FALENCE ROAD- THESE PLAGUEY MUSKETEERS HAVE COST ME SEVEN MEN ALREADY!

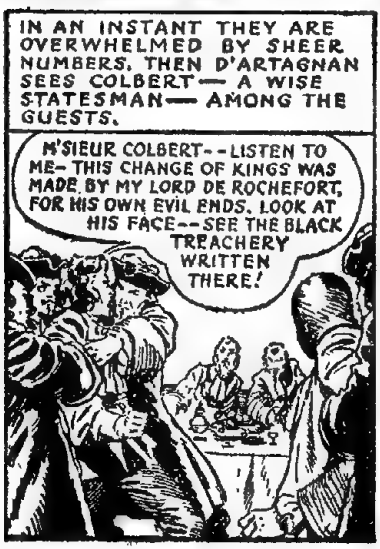
THEY'RE RETREATING, ATHOS--- WHAT NOW?
PAH! AS LIKE AS NOT THEY PLAN TO DODGE OUR SWORDS BY TAKING THE FALENCE ROAD- BUT I HAVE AN ANSWER TO THAT, COMRADE ARAMIS. COME--- THROUGH THE WOODS!

UP THE STEEP SLOPES OF THE RAVINE THEY CLIMB, AND THROUGH THE WOODS ABOVE THE NARROW ROAD---

AT LAST THEY COME OUT ON THE HEIGHTS ABOVE THE FALENCE ROAD---
THERE THEY COME!
THE ROCKS, COMRADE! LET US BOMBARD THEM WITH ROCKS!
IN VAIN THE CAVALCADE BELOW TRIES TO SCATTER AND FIND SHELTER, BUT THE BOUNDING ROCKS ARE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE---
TEN THOUSAND CURSES UPON THOSE MUSKETEERS! I DID NOT BARGAIN FOR THIS -- BY NOW D'ARTAGNAN AND THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK MUST BE A FULL LEAGUE AHEAD!

AND THANKS TO ATHOS AND ARAMIS, D'ARTAGNAN AND HIS KING GALLOP ON - - -
NO SIGN OF PURSUIT, NOW D'ARTAGNAN - - - BUT I WONDER HOW YOUR VALIANT COMRADES ARE FARING ON THE ROAD BEHIND
THEY'LL DO THEIR DUTY, OR DIE, YOUR MAJESTY

PARIS AT LAST - AND BY GOOD FORTUNE THE PALACE GUARD IS FORMED OF MUSKETEERS. D'ARTAGNAN BURSTS INTO THE BANQUETTING HALL WHERE DE ROCHEFORT SITS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FALSE KING.
MY LORDS OF FRANCE - - I BRING YOU YOUR TRUE KING. HE WHO SITS AT THE TABLE'S HEAD IS FALSE!
GUARDS! SEIZE THOSE MEN - - CUT THEM DOWN! - THEY ARE TRAITORS!


IN AN INSTANT THEY ARE OVERWHELMED BY SHEER NUMBERS, THEN D'ARTAGNAN SEES COLBERT — A WISE STATESMAN — AMONG THE GUESTS.
M'SIEUR COLBERT - - LISTEN TO ME - THIS CHANGE OF KINGS WAS MADE BY MY LORD DE ROCHEFORT, FOR HIS OWN EVIL ENDS. LOOK AT HIS FACE - - SEE THE BLACK TREACHERY WRITTEN THERE!

BUT THEN, ANNE OF AUSTRIA, THE QUEEN MOTHER, SPEAKS.
WAIT - - HEAR ME SPEAK. I HAVE BEEN SILENT ABOUT THE TRUTH FOR LONG ENOUGH, THESE TWO KINGS ARE BROTHERS - - TWIN BROTHERS - - MY SONS! SOMEHOW DE ROCHEFORT FERRETTED OUT THE SECRET OF THEIR BIRTH, AND PLACED PHILIP UPON THE THRONE IN PLACE OF LOUIS. I COULD NOT SPEAK FOR FEAR THAT HE MIGHT KILL LOUIS - - BUT NOW D'ARTAGNAN HAS BROUGHT YOU BACK YOUR TRUE KING!
GUARD THE DOORS - - LET NO MAN LEAVE!

MY LORD DE ROCHEFORT- - I'LL TROUBLE YOU FOR THE KEY OF THE IRON MASK!
YOU'LL ONLY GET IT OVER MY DEAD BODY, D'ARTAGNAN!
THAT, MY LORD DE ROCHEFORT, WILL BE A REAL PLEASURE!
ONCE BEFORE, DE ROCHEFORT, I THOUGHT THAT I HAD PUT AN END TO YOUR EVIL CAREER - - BUT LIKE A CRAFTY FOX, YOU WERE ONLY PRETENDING DEATH. THIS TIME I SHALL MAKE NO MISTAKE ~ EN GARDE, DE ROCHEFORT!
NOW DE ROCHEFORT IS FRESH, WHILE D'ARTAGNAN IS WEARY AFTER THE LONG RIDE ~ ~ ~ ~
YOU'VE MET YOUR MATCH - - D'ARTAGNAN!
THE MUSKETEER IS FORCED BACK ~ ~ ~ AND BACK ~ ~ ~
NOT QUITE GOOD ENOUGH, DE ROCHEFORT. IT'S A KING'S MUSKETEER YOU'RE FIGHTING ~ ~ ~ AN HONOUR FOR VERMIN SUCH AS YOU!

D'ARTAGNAN GATHERS ALL HIS STRENGTH, AND IN ONE LEAPING THRUST HURLS HIS ENEMY FROM HIM.
PREPARE TO MEET YOUR END, DE ROCHEFORT - - IF YOU KNOW ANY PRAYERS - - - SAY 'EM NOW!
NOW THE TABLES ARE TURNED, AND D'ARTAGNAN LOOMS OVER DE ROCHEFORT.
NO - - NO, D'ARTAGNAN! MERCY! I AM NOT FIT TO DIE!
BUT THERE IS NO MERCY IN D'ARTAGNAN THEN - - - HE IS REMEMBERING POOR CONSTANCE.
SO PERISH ALL ENEMIES OF FRANCE!

THEN D'ARTAGNAN TAKES THE KEY FROM DE ROCHEFORT'S POCKET AND UNLOCKS THE IRON MASK - -

A WEEK LATER IN THE BLUE BOAR TAVERN, THE MUSKETEERS ARE REUNITED - -

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